

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-16

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US: Soviets might try to disguise an invasion

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WASHINGTON — A consensus is developing throughout the US government that the Soviet Union intends to stage a big Warsaw Pact military exercise in Poland that could serve as a Trojan horse to disguise an invasion.

From the Kremlin point of view, American analysts suggest such a strategy would offer the following potential advantages:

- If the Soviets, Czechs and other pact forces were invited by Polish authorities for an exercise, it would make it more difficult for the West to invoke retaliatory economic and political measures — unless or until there were widespread instances of Soviets shooting Poles.

- If the intervention was sufficiently awesome, it might intimidate the Poles enough to prevent major bloodletting.

Coming in under the guise of an exercise also might enable the Soviets to place themselves in key positions at airfields and military command centers and around the 15 Polish divisions in such a way as to make it difficult for resistance by organized elements of the Polish armed forces.

Analysts say there are a number of recent intelligence indicators compelling them to believe such a scenario. Among them:

- Five major troop concentrations have been pinpointed: the largest near Kaliningrad, pointing toward Gdansk and other Polish Baltic ports; a second along the border due east of Warsaw; a third near the border southeast of Krakow; a fourth involving Soviet divisions in East Germany west of Poznan; and a fifth comprising four to six Czech divisions south of the Polish mining region of Silesia.

- Additional Soviet divisions continue to move toward forward staging areas along with large stocks of ammunition and fuel. Substantial

quantities of ammunition would not be needed merely for an exercise.

- Mobile hospital units are being positioned forward near the Soviet-Polish border. Normally, field exercises don't cause enough casualties to require special medical units beyond those already in each division.

- Signs of active tactical reconnaissance of major road and rail systems heading into Poland have been picked up.

- The commander of Soviet forces in East Germany, an experienced officer who has held that post for eight years, has just been replaced by the Soviet commander who supervised the mobilization of Soviet forces over the last three months. The Russian commander in Czechoslovakia was simultaneously replaced. The speculation is that these two generals might have had doubts about the wisdom of intervention and were replaced with officers who entertained no such doubts.

Since Sunday, when the White House announced Soviet military preparations had been essentially completed to permit a major move, analysts have been trying to assess whether Moscow intended merely a show of force along the borders to back a political crackdown in Poland, a Warsaw Pact exercise in Poland such as occurred in Czechoslovakia a couple of weeks prior to an invasion there, or an invasion itself.

"There's no longer any doubt that a big exercise inside Poland is planned," one official declared yesterday. "We're getting reports from all over."

But the information does not say when that might occur, if it does. Now that Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev has returned home from India, some officials surmise the most likely time would be by next Tuesday, when ceremonies are planned at Gdansk and elsewhere in Poland to commemorate the 10th anniversary of bloody riots in the Baltic ports.

Reports in Poland suggest as many as a million Poles may congregate in Gdansk, where the independent Solidarity Union movement was born this summer, to witness the unveiling of a monument to Poles slain there by security forces in the 1970 riots.

Snow, winds and low ceilings may complicate Kremlin planning, one official noted. It is assumed the Soviets would like a one-to-three day break in the stormy weather to permit flying in airborne and helicopter units, supply transports and tactical jet fighters.

One senior official said he would not be surprised if the Soviets, in laying out the Warsaw Pact exercise to include Polish units, mislead the Poles on the number of Soviet divisions coming in until an overwhelming force of approximately 30 divisions is in place.

This would be designed to mask their intentions and minimize chances of organized opposition by units of the Polish armed forces, the second strongest military force in the pact.

But along with Soviet troops, it was suggested, might come a number of KGB agents to round up Polish dissidents, leaders of independent labor and farm groups, key Catholic intellectuals and other potential troublemakers.

"If the move is sufficiently adroit and awesome," one analyst said, "it's possible they can head off prolonged, bloody resistance."